

HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

OF THE

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

A regular meeting of the Human Services Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on Thursday, August 30, 2012 at 10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Legislator DuWayne Gregory, Chair
Legislator Kara Hahn, Vice Chair
Legislator Kate Browning
Legislator Lou D'Amaro
Legislator Ed Romaine

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk, Suffolk County Legislature
Sara Simpson, Assistant Counsel, Suffolk County Legislature
Diane Dono, Budget Review Office
Greg Blass, Commissioner, SC Department of Social Services
Linda O'Dohone, SC Department of Social Services
Paul Perillie, Aide to Legislator Gregory
Justin Littell, Aide to Legislator D'Amaro
Ali Nazir, Aide to Legislator Kennedy
Tim Rothang, Aide to Legislator Browning
Seth Squicciarino, Aide to Legislator Hahn
Marie Berkoski, County Executive's Office
Stacey Scarpone, Director, Women's Fund of Long Island
Other Interested Parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Lucia Braaten, Court Stenographer

MINUTES TRANSCRIBED BY:

Kim Castiglione, Legislative Secretary

(THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 10:03 A.M.)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

We're going to start off with the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Legislator D'Amaro.

(*Salutation*)

Thank you. Please be seated. Thank you all for coming to today's Human Services Committee meeting. It's an unusual date because of the holiday, but we all -- we certainly welcome your presence. We do not have any cards for the public portion. Is there anyone in the audience that would like to speak? Okay. We'll go to our presentation today. We have Stacey Scarpone. Would you please come forward?

MS. SCARPONE:

Well, thank you, everyone, for having me, for inviting me to come. My name is Stacey Scarpone and I'm the Executive Director of the Women's Fund of Long Island. It was kind of interesting, I want to tell you a funny story that happened to me while I came here today, just to sort of break the ice, because I think it's very humorous.

So I've never been to this office before and I'm driving, and I come into the office and I'm driving around and I had to stop and ask somebody, "Where do I? Where do I go?" And they tell me drive around that way, go in front of the Police Station. You pass the Police Station and you drive. So I'm driving, and my iPhone hasn't synched up with my office phone, so I had the wrong time, but I didn't know that. So I drive around and all of a sudden I park my car and I think, "Oh my goodness, I'm late, I'm late" and I'm rushing and getting all of my things out, and this police car is circling, you know, the lights are on. And she says, "What was that all about?" And I said, "Excuse me?" And she said, "Well, you ran the stop sign and what are you doing?" And I said, "I have to go and present in front of the Legislature's office, please let me go." She said, "Well, next time that you're lost remember to stop at the stop sign, and remember when the lights are flashing behind you that you are supposed to pull over."

So this is my introduction to all of you, but I didn't get a ticket because I'm presenting in front of all of you. So anyway -- and that's the first time I've ever, ever been pulled over, ever in my life. I'm thirty-nine years old, this is the first time I've been pulled over, right in front of the police station. I thought that was quite humorous.

But, anyway, so the Women's Fund of Long Island has been in existence for 20 years. We are located in Jericho, which is in Nassau County. Basically what we do is we provide services to -- to women and girls issues, some of the most emerging issues that are facing women and girls all throughout Long Island. And for whatever reason, we are really sort of not one of those known organizations. We've been around and we've been providing services, but people don't really know about us or who we are. And the Women's Funding Network, we're part of the Women's Funding Network, that's 160 women's funds throughout the world. It's a wonderful network to be a part of and there are so many different resources.

Some of the things that we look at is we look at leadership, we look at social justice issues and we look at economic stability. Those are the focuses and the core of our organization, and beneath that there are many different subcategories. What we do is we provide grants to some of the -- some of the most grassroots organizations, nonprofit's here on Long Island that are providing services to women and girls. And one of the great things about providing grants to grassroots organizations is these are organizations that maybe aren't going to attract larger donors. They're doing innovative programs that maybe larger donors don't want to fund. You know, they want to fund what they've seen before. What we like to do is we like to look at what hasn't been done

because if you, you know, if you keep doing what you've already done, you get what you've already gotten, right? So we want to see change, we want to see different things happening for women and girls across Long Island.

These are not just grants that we give out. We also provide services and resources to these organizations. And I have a perfect example. One of our grantee partners is an organization called I Try, which is located out in East Hampton. And this organization, they were -- you know, it was about this mother who came home from work one day and she plopped down on her couch and she sat down next to her daughter, and they started munching on some chips and she looked at her daughter and she looked at herself and she thought this is my life, but does this have to be my daughter's life? Now, you think East Hampton, right? We all think East Hampton, beautiful, fabulous Hamptons, beaches, gorgeous, all of that, but we don't think about the immigrant population that is living out there and the impoverished that are living out in East Hampton. We only think about the glitz and glamour. Well, there's a whole other side to East Hampton.

What this woman started was this triathlon -- a transformation through triathlon training program in which she reached out to at risk girls, children of undocumented immigrants and other at risk teenagers or preteens and said to them, "Let's talk to you about what you're doing in your life, let's build your self-esteem, let's try and make something of your life and make you believe that you can be better than you are."

I had the opportunity -- I just started at the Women's Fund of Long Island so I'm new to this organization. I've been here for two months, but I had the opportunity to go out and visit one of our grantee partners, which was this I Try organization. And interestingly enough, the day before I had spent the day and the evening with Donna Karan at her beautiful mansion, you know, four houses on the water, and was talking to her about issues that were facing Long Islanders. And so here I am in this plush surroundings, beautiful, and then I go and I'm, you know, faced with what the other reality of East Hampton is. And so when you watch these girls, and I had a chance to talk to their parents, who didn't speak English, and when you watch these girls cross the finish line, you see on their faces what they can do, what they can accomplish, which is what they never believed they could, just by the virtue of crossing a finish line, right, what that represents to them and what it represents to their families who are looking and searching for that American dream for their children, for their girls.

And it was this beautiful opportunity, and it's a beautiful opportunity also for this organization, who is a very grassroots organization who could not attract funding from a larger foundation. Well, this is the third year that we're funding them. And we give small grants, we don't give large grants. We give out small grants, but what it does is it gives them credibility for other larger funders. So now this organization has now grown. So they had eight girls the first year, they had ten the next year, they now have 45 this year and they have attracted State funding, they've attracted national attention for the work that they're doing, all because we gave them one of their first grants and we said we're going to invest in you, we're going to invest in change, in something that's different, that's not the same type of program that we've seen before.

But, you know, one of the other things that I saw out there was the dichotomy of the rich and poor. And, you know, I think with the globalization of the economy what's happening is that we're forgetting and the issues at home are becoming invisible. And, in fact, we have a lot of issues here at home, right here on Long Island. And I can say that I am a Long Islander, I grew up in Port Jefferson, but for many of my years I spent living overseas. I spent about 12 years living in Latin America, in Eastern Europe in all the war zones, in Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia. I lived in Africa, in Eastern Africa, in Western Africa. I worked for the United Nations. I would consult with governments. They would call me in to say we have a human trafficking problem in our country, what is the situation? Can you, please look at it? Can you help us strategize, and can you -- we

need to change this.

And so I've seen all of these issues that are facing the most marginalized of women and girls throughout the world. I've given my time, my energy, my love to all of these organizations and all of these places all throughout the world, and I thought this is where my time is best spent. And a few years ago I came back to the United States and I started looking around me, and not only in the United States, but in my own home, which is Long Island, which is now where I am here living and raising my own three children, and I think to myself, we have problems here. You know, this is happening, all those issues that I saw happening overseas in all of these other places, whether it was homelessness, whether it was human trafficking, whether it was discrimination, whether it was unequal pay, those issues are the very same issues that are happening right here in the United States and right here on Long Island.

How many of you know that we have a human trafficking problem on Long Island? That we have a trafficking problem, sex trafficking; young girls are being trafficked into the sex trade industry. That we have a problem with labor trafficking; that people are being forced to work, women are being forced to work without pay. That is trafficking. These are laws that we have enacted here in New York State. But yet, what are we really doing? I know in Nassau County they have just put into place the first advocate for human -- survivors of human trafficking, so when you face the courts there's an advocate who will -- who is in place to support these victims. So we're starting to look at it, but we really have to sort of define what it means for us here on Long Island. Nobody wants to look at it. We don't want to pick up the covers and see our dirty little secrets because we have beautiful beaches and we have the celebrities who live out in East Hampton and, you know, we have all that fabulousness to offer, all these people who want to come to Long Island. But Long Island also has problems and we need to address those problems.

And I've become somewhat of a bore as I go to dinner parties because I'm always standing on my soapbox screaming about all of these things. And they'll say Stacey weren't you the one who lived overseas and said, "Oh my gosh, this is what's happening in Rwanda and this is what's happening in Haiti and this is what what's happening here and, you know, everybody come, rally, support" and I'd be the one who'd be raising funds, and, you know, getting everyone to rally around these issues. Well guess what, now I'm rallying around the issues happening here on Long Island with our women and girls here, because it's here, it's here and we're not looking at it, we're not seeing it.

I was just visiting another project, a grantee partner, North Shore Holiday House out in Huntington, a beautiful program that we also support, we give funding to. And just -- we give funding and one of the great reasons why people like to give funding to us is because we vet out our organizations. So if you're giving money to us you know that it's going to organizations who are actually doing the work and your money is going where it's supposed to be going. So I visited this organization and it's a camp program for young kids whose parents have been incarcerated, who are homeless, who are living in transitional housing. And I said, "Wow, this is amazing." I said, "You bus these kids in from the City?" And she said, "No, these kids are Long Island kids. These are kids from Long Island who are homeless." And this is a girls camp. There are girls from Long Island who are homeless, these are girls from Long Island whose parents are incarcerated, these are girls from Long Island who need help. And again, another eye opening incident that happens for me, you know, because I'm learning. I'm learning at each new turn just as I'm trying to, you know, spread the word to all of you that these issues are at home, that we have these issues here at home.

And, so again, on my soapbox, 28% graduation rate in Hempstead High School. I know this is Suffolk County, but we have our own issues here happening in Suffolk County. How is that possible? How is that acceptable? You know, again, in one of the richest areas of the country that we're accepting low graduation rates, which for a girl or a woman means she drops out of school, she becomes pregnant. She doesn't have any opportunities for work, she might go to jail, and the

cycle continues and continues and continues and continues, until we say no, the cycle doesn't continue.

You know, we need to be looking at these issues, we need to be creating programs instead of cutting programs. Instead of slashing the budgets we need to be creating -- making sure that there's more money in the budgets, and we need people such as yourselves standing on your own soapboxes saying what are we doing about human trafficking? How come that's not on our agenda today, why aren't we talking about that? Because it's here and it's happening here.

So I'm out in the field, you know, I go out into the field quite often and I go and I talk to not only our grantee partners, and this year we've funded 12 different partners throughout Nassau and Suffolk County from the East End all the way to Queens. But I talk to our grantee partners to hear what's happening, what's happening on, you know, economic stability issues, what's happening in leadership, what's happening in social justice issues. But then I go and I talk to other people who are not our partners, who we might not be giving grants to, because in order for me to speak knowledgeably to all of you, it's not coming from me, it's not coming from the top down, it needs to come from the bottom up. We need to hear from the people who are on the ground saying these are the issues, these are the problems that we're having, we need to be doing something about them. We need to be making sure that there are programs available, that people are funding, that people are talking about these issues.

Because I'm concerned, you know, as somebody who is not only working in this area, but somebody who's raising her own children. I have a young girl and I have, you know, young boys who, you know, I like to think that I'm raising them as strong, intelligent men who are growing up in these communities and I want to make sure that these things don't happen to them, because it's just as easy to fall into the cracks. Just because you have good parents and all of those things, it doesn't mean that you're not susceptible to becoming a victim of human trafficking.

What happens to a young girl, you know, maybe her self-esteem is low, maybe she hasn't gotten great grades in school and she feels pressure from her family. And then all of a sudden she finds herself, you know, meeting this young guy who thinks she's just the greatest and talks her into, you know, whatever it is, and she finds herself falling into that trap and walking that line, and before she knows it, she's trafficked. And as a young girl under the age of 18, if you are forced into a sexual situation you are trafficked. It's not prostitution, and so there's a difference. And you have those different laws that are -- that exist. And so we need to look closely at this.

And so I'm here to tell all of you about all of this that's happening, just to give you sort of a taste of some of the issues that are happening here on Long Island. So you have homelessness, and we know that, you know, and I just visited, as I said, I just visited some young girls who are homeless, who get two weeks out of the summer to pretend that they're not, to pretend that they're young girls and that they're living the life that your kids are living. You know, that they get to play and be free and don't have to think of any of those things at all for two weeks. Imagine that, two weeks out of the summer, right?

We have human trafficking, girls and women who are trafficked, either for sexual purposes or for labor purposes, and are forced to work or forced to have sex against their will. I've also spoken to some of the immigrant women who say that, you know, they're working in bars out on the East End or wherever it might be in Suffolk County and Nassau County and they're working in these bars and they're trying to make a decent living. And what they find is after hours those bars aren't bars and they're not making -- they're not doing what they were supposed to be doing and they are forced to do things they don't want to be doing. But nobody is going to help them, and they don't want to go to the police or talk to anybody because they're afraid, they're afraid of their legal standing and what they should do and what rights they have. Well, why is that right and why is that happening

underneath our own roofs?

I got a call the other day at my office where this woman said to me, "I have a job, it's not a great job but I have a job. I have two children, I'm paying my rent. This month I'm coming short on my rent. They've gone through the proceedings to evict me and they've gone through all the different proceedings and now it's 72 hours and I'm going to be evicted." And she said, "I'm looking into homeless shelters and now the problem is, is that they told me I need to quit my job in order to get into a homeless shelter, in order for my kids to get into a homeless shelter." She said, "What am I supposed to do? I have a job. It's not a good job, but I have a job." How do I respond to that? You know, as a women's organization who is supposed to have her finger on the pulse of what's happening on Long Island, how do I respond to a woman who says that to me, you know, and knowing that I'm a woman with my own children of course my heartstrings are pulled but also my professional strings, you know, this is my job. This is what I'm supposed to be doing.

So I want to -- I want to just appeal to all of you to be thinking about some of these issues that we have that we need to lift the cover up. It's not always nice things to look at, and I recognize that, but that's how change is made, right? We have to look at what's happening, we have to identify it, we have to point at it, we have to say it's time for a change. And I'd like to be one of those organizations that steps up to the box and says yeah, I'm going to make some changes.

So I will -- I hope to meet with each of you individually and come and talk to you individually about what it is that we're doing and some of the things that I'd like to do. You know, when I was sitting and talking with Donna Karan I said, "Donna, listen, you give your money overseas. What about your money here?" And the same thing with other people is that what are we doing here? You know, it's okay to give your money overseas, that's great, but let's start giving our money in our own backyard. Let's start looking at our issues in our own backyard. Let's help our women and girls, let's invest in the power of women and the dream of girls here, right here in our own backyard on Long Island.

So I want to thank you for your time, and I -- I will be contacting each of you. I'm looking at everyone's name, and I'm going to contact each of you, because I think it's really important that we sit down and discuss how, in each of your districts, how we can make a difference, how we can make a change, and we can stand up for the rights of women's and girls here and make a change in our own communities. So thank you all very much for your time. I appreciate that.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Great. Thank you, Stacey. And for those that don't know Stacey or haven't met Stacey, you probably know her mother, Nancy Mariano from Friends of Karen. We met --

MS. SCARPONE:

It runs in the family.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Right. We met -- now that you see, you see the resemblance.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

Yeah.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

We met at our annual meeting, right about a month ago now I guess, and we spent about five minutes talking about the budget and Friends of Karen, and about 30 minutes talking about her wonderful daughter, how she's been all over the world fighting against human trafficking and is the new Executive Director at the Women's Fund, and so we have to have her in, so here she is.

Thank you for coming. You certainly speak the truth to most of what you said, all of what you said. I agree that we have, you know, Suffolk County and Long Island, you know, there's a certain image out there, and that image doesn't necessarily paint an accurate picture of everything that happens, particularly our homeless and our impoverished communities. I've looked at the various organizations that your organization funds, and a lot of them are contract agencies or former contract agencies with the County. So our missions are in sync in a lot of ways.

I would like to, you know, I look forward to speaking to you one on one about what we can do about, you know, human trafficking and other issues that are so prevalent that go unnoticed. And I'm a nighttime watcher, I don't go to bed like 1, 1:30 and I'm always, especially on the weekends, like MSNBC, they're always running some type of show and it's like human trafficking, and I was watching a show maybe about two months ago and it's horrific. You know, you think that, you know, you hear stories where, you know, a woman responded to a classified ad in the paper for like marketing and before you know it, you know, there was one girl from Iowa, she wanted to come to New York City, she responded to an ad. She thinks she was going to be some telemarketer and she was, you know, trafficked, you know, in New York City.

MS. SCARPONE:

On Long Island.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Right, right. So it's -- you think it's easy to get out of, but the way they show it, they really illustrate in a way that it's really horrific what happens. It shows how easily someone can kind of fall into that trap and it's scary.

MS. SCARPONE:

For sure. And it's not just -- you know, I think sometimes there's a misconception, especially here, if I were to say to you, oh, human trafficking. There's the misconception that people think it must be, you know, the immigrant population or people must be coming in from Mexico or wherever it is and they're the ones who are being trafficked. Yes, we have that population that's being trafficked, but we have, you know, young girls who grew up right here or as you said, girls from other states who come in. But it happens right here. It's so easy to happen, and you don't have to chain -- it's not that misconception about chaining somebody to a bed or chaining somebody to whatever. It doesn't have to happen that way. It's psychological, it's psychological capture. And believe me, I've seen it. I've been all over the world, I've seen it. So I've seen it everywhere. I've seen it in Africa, I've seen it in Latin America, I've seen it in Eastern Europe and I'm seeing it here.

And I'm talking to people and it's happening here. The crazy thing is that we don't have a handle on the numbers, so when I, you know, when I visited this advocate in Nassau County and I asked about numbers, we don't have a strong handle on the numbers because we're just now dealing with the problem and looking at it as an issue. We knew that it existed and now we're starting to recognize okay, this is the issue. Now we need to distinguish it, you know, I don't want to get into a political discussion about prostitution and human trafficking. But there is a, you know, there's a distinction and there's laws that are in place. So now they're trying to look at some of those cases and say okay, this is a trafficking case and we need to address it that way. And then the other distinction is that there's labor trafficking as well. There's people who are forced into labor situations and it's not just our immigrant population, again. I think we really need to be aware of that.

Women and girls are the most vulnerable, they're the most vulnerable populations. You know, I think it's really important to look at that and it's important to look at our education systems that are happening and the graduation rates that are happening, you know, out here as well. What is it, Shirley/Mastic, one of those schools that also is very low as well. And, you know, because

it -- directly there's a correlation, you know, between what happens in graduation rates, the education and young girls and where they go. You know, I'm fortunate enough, right, I'm lucky enough. I grew up in a family and I got to go to college, and I got to go to grad school and I went overseas and I had those opportunities. There are people who don't have those opportunities, and why aren't we affording them those opportunities. Why aren't we making sure that our kids graduate from high school? That's a basic, an absolute basic. No child left behind, that's really, you know, really every child should be able to graduate.

So, anyway, I thank you very much for all of your time, for giving me these moments. And I look forward to meeting with all of you individually.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Stacey, Legislator D'Amaro has a question for you.

MS. SCARPONE:

Oh, sure.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Good morning. Thank you for talking --

MS. SCARPONE:

Thank you.

LEG. D'AMARO:

-- at length with respect to very important issues. You know, they're basic questions, but they have very complex explanations and very complex solutions. I wanted to ask you a couple of things. First, with respect to the trafficking, which I agree with you, there's a certain stereotypical vision that folks have about what trafficking is, but it really occurs outside of that as well. And I want to ask you how much you believe technology is playing a role in enhancing the ability or making trafficking more prevalent.

MS. SCARPONE:

Absolutely. I think it plays a huge role because it's an underground business. You have to remember that the three largest moneymakers worldwide are trafficking in drugs, trafficking in arms and trafficking in human beings. We're talking about billions of dollars that are changing hands worldwide, and it's underground. There are routes that are very, very well oiled routes throughout the world, depending on where you are and how they traffic people. And, you know, there's a well oiled route right here in the United States, right here in New York. So the more that they can go underground the easier it is for them to operate, and the internet is a perfect example. You know, we have young kids who are, you know, surfing the web and they don't really know what they're looking for or how they're looking for it.

LEG. D'AMARO:

See, the internet is very unregulated in a sense, and a lot of the issues that you're talking about here come down to like a multi-pronged approach to protecting kids and to trying to solve some of the problems. Obviously the schools need to be involved, obviously there's a role for government to play also. But it also comes often down to parental guidance and parental responsibility.

I'm not sure, you know, as a parent myself, how do you, as your kids get older, how do you limit the content? I mean, there are certain things that you can do now, but you know, they can go to a friend's house that has an iPad or has a computer that's not protected. It's very difficult. So, you know, that's why there's a role for schools for educating kids from an early age and things like that. And it makes the solutions to these issues, given the world that we live in and the technology, that

often children are in families where there are two parents working or perhaps they're in families where there's one parent or that their parents are not working. I mean, there's all kinds of scenarios out there that makes the solutions to these types of problems very complicated.

But I think there's a basic question that is important when you talk about some of these issues, including trafficking, is how do you identify children that are more susceptible to it so you can prevent it before it happens?

MS. SCARPONE:

Well, I wouldn't -- I mean, okay kids that are more susceptible. It can happen to anybody, so let's not kid ourselves and think that there are only certain types of kids that it can happen to. But, you know, definitely a child who has a low self-esteem, right? If, you know, they're on the outside and looking to fit in some way.

There is the -- you know, here in the United States we sort of have this lover boy affect what they call, and so you have a young girl who maybe doesn't feel so great about herself and she has this young boy who comes up to her and he makes her feel all the great things that she never felt before from anyone else. He becomes her friend and befriends her. And before you know it, their entering into a sexual relationship, and then before you know it, he's saying to her listen, I need you to help me out with something, I can't pay my rent. At this point she already feels so wonderful about herself from this person that she falls into the trap and she says okay, sure. She's a 14 year old girl, sure I'll sleep with that guy. And before she knows it, she's being pimped out and she's trafficked. That is trafficking. By the way, that is trafficking.

But -- so obviously low self-esteem, right, that's definitely, you know, a big ticker. And, you know, I think -- but other than that it can really happen to anybody. You know, you get into a fight with your parents and you run away and you meet somebody. You know, I had -- many years ago when I had come back here and I first had my children, I had my twin boys and I had be living in Guinea, West Africa and I came back and I had -- I met this woman from Guinea who had worked with me when I was in Guinea and I said, "Do you want to come to the United States and help me with my children?" And so I worked with an immigration attorney and we worked for six months and we brought her over from Guinea. So everything was on the up and up, you know, everything was legal. And I thought to myself this is a beautiful opportunity because I'll be helping her, you know, get out of Guinea. She walked out of the war in Liberia into Guinea and she'll be helping me because I trust her and I think she's this wonderful woman and what a beautiful relationship that will be.

So we worked with this immigration attorney and we got her, you know, settled here, and she was freaked out by the United States. It was just too much for her. She grew up in a community where you -- the community raises you and you know everybody and this was just too much for her. She said, "Stacey, I just can't do it." And her sister was living in Arizona, was a legal citizen in Arizona. And she said, "I think I'm just going to go to Arizona." I said, "And how are you going to get there?" She said, "I'm just going to hop on a bus." I said, "First of all, you can't do that because legally, you know, we have to talk to the attorneys and figure out, you know, what you're allowed to do now that you're not going to be working here." But I said, "Secondly, this is what I do for a living." I said, "Somebody's going to pick you off of that bus and you are so prime for the picking it's not even funny." They just know, they see it in a young girl who's somehow lost.

And it could be lost in so many different ways, and what we think of as lost, you know, you think you're raising your child to be, you know, a self-sufficient young leader in the community or whatever it is, but, you know, it's just really -- I find -- and, you know, you talked about this idea of being, you know, two parents working or a single parent or somebody isn't home. I'm a single mom and I'm raising three children, and in my house it's about communication. We talk about

everything. Things that you think that an eight year old or a nine and a half year old shouldn't be talking about, you better believe it's discussed at my dinner table. They can talk to you about human trafficking and what happens at that age, and we talk about.

And so I think in this day and age we have to stop being afraid to talk to our kids about things, because you know what? They already know about it. They're on the internet. You just talked about the internet? They see it all, they know it all. If it comes from you rather than somebody else or somebody saying that's not true, but you're hearing it from your parents. So if it can come from your parents then I think it needs to come there. For sure it needs to be in the curriculums at school. We need to be talking about things like this in school. We need to be educating them not only, I know in my kids' school they talk about computer safety and, you know, internet safety and they have classes on that, but, you know, we have these -- some of these schools that don't have the budget for any of these things, and some parents who aren't at home, who aren't able to, you know, be that primary person in their child's life.

So you're right, it is really difficult, but it involves the whole community, and that's one of the things that I learned from this young woman who came to my home and stayed from Guinea, West Africa, is it's about a community raising a child and we all need to pitch in. And there are many families who can't, so we all need to be a part of it, you know, whether it's government and schools and communities and parents and we need to pitch in and raise these children together and help them out. I don't know if that answers your question.

LEG. D'AMARO:

No, it does. I agree with you. I think that there's a role for each of those segments, schools, parents, government perhaps. But my point is that while it can happen to anyone, I think there are those that could be more susceptible and if those --

MS. SCARPONE:

The most marginalized.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right, if they can be identified then you get into the reasons why are they more susceptible, but even more important than why is the what do we do about it, and that's what we try and deal with here. And, you know, whether it's funding organizations to, you know, providing funds that organizations out there to help kids or to intervene, things like that, but it's very frustrating because it seems that it's a very complicated society that we live in, and it seems that no matter how much you spend and no matter how many programs you have, are we really having an impact, are we making a dent in the problem? It seems like what you're presenting here, it's a real issue, it's a growing issue, it's a growing problem, it's the underbelly of society that we don't, like you said before, you have to kind of lift it up and look underneath to see what's really going on.

So what I would like to do is when I hear someone like yourself present these problems, and you do a wonderful job of defining the problem and I think you understand the problem and even the causes, it leads me to think about what are some of the solutions to these problems. And I think it is about the schools and parenting and things like that. But I don't think those answers are easy to implement. It's very difficult.

MS. SCARPONE:

For sure not. And when you ask the question about, you know, of course it's the most marginalized, right. Those are the first people who we can look at, the most marginalized in society, the most marginalized girls who are coming from, you know, lower income or immigrant families. For sure those are the most at risk. And, you know, funding, yes, funding some innovative new programs, you know, such as this organization that we're working with, you know, some of the

organizations that we're working with that looks at, you know, self-esteem issues. You know, this young girl who is sitting on the couch munching on the chips, she's the same young girl who's on the internet saying who's going to be my friend.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right.

MS. SCARPONE:

And now you know what she's doing? She's running triathlons. She's going I don't need to be on the internet, I'm an athlete now. I'm running triathlons, I feel really good about myself. I can do anything now. You know, the parents who I spoke to, you know, after the triathlon who couldn't even speak English, you know, I'm speaking to them in Spanish, they couldn't even speak English. And they were saying to me I never thought my daughter could do this, I never thought this could be her future. So what did they think her future could be? You know, so I think it is about looking at innovative, new solutions. We can't keep doing the same old things. We have to be doing innovative, new programs, and part of it is okay, so let's define the problem. And it might be different in different communities. If you're in a Haitian community, if you are in an Afghan community, if you're in an African American community. It might be different culturally in how you interact with the different communities, but I think it needs to be -- you know, go into those different communities. Don't create a blanket program for everybody because it's not going to work.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right, and that's support for the children and it's also support for the parents.

MS. SCARPONE:

Right.

LEG. D'AMARO:

You know, it's very difficult for many parents to try and bring their kids up as best they possibly can given all of the different things that are tugging at you in a day in so many different directions. So keep up the good work, I appreciate it.

MS. SCARPONE:

Thank you so much. I look forward to meeting you.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Thank you.

MS. SCARPONE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Anyone else have any questions? Thank you, Stacy.

MS. SCARPONE:

Thank you so much. I left a few cards and also my cards for all of you, and I will be sure to contact all of you. Thank you, everyone. Have a wonderful day.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Thank you again. Very informative.

MS. SCARPONE:

Enjoy your weekend, your holiday weekend.

LEG. HAHN:

Thank you for all that you do for women and girls.

MS. SCARPONE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay. Let's get to the agenda. We have tabled resolutions.

Tabled Resolutions

IR 1234, Directing the Department of Social Services to close the sex offender trailer in Westhampton, Town of Southampton (Schneiderman).

LEG. D'AMARO:

Motion to table.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Motion to table by Legislator D'Amaro. Seconded by Legislator Hahn. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions?

LEG. ROMAINE:

Opposed.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay. **(Vote: 4-1-0-0 Opposed: Legislator Romaine)**

IR 1489, Adopting Local Law No. -2012, A Local Law to improve the safety of vehicles used by child care providers that contract with the County ("Look Before You Leave Our Children Act") (Stern).

This has to be tabled for a public hearing. I'll make that motion. Seconded by Legislator Hahn. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? **(Vote: 5-0-0-0)**

Introductory Resolutions

We have ***IR 1842, To appoint member to the Teen Pregnancy Advisory Board (Susan B. Koenig) (Spencer).*** Is she present? No? They are not reappointments so I'm going to offer a motion to table. Second by Legislator D'Amaro. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? **(Vote: 5-0-0-0)**

IR 1874, To appoint member to the Teen Pregnancy Advisory Board (Jeannette Morales) (Spencer).

LEG. D'AMARO:

Motion to table.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Motion to table by Legislator D'Amaro. I will second it. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? **(Vote: 5-0-0-0)**

IR 1876, Establishing a task force to optimize early intervention for children with special needs (Spencer).

I will offer a motion to approve. Second by Legislator Hahn. And, Legislator Browning, you have a question?

LEG. BROWNING:

No, not on this.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay. Any questions? Everyone is pulling up their mics. Something's going on. We have an offer to approve and a second, right? All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? **(Vote: 5-0-0-0)**

LEG. ROMAINE:

I'll defer to Kate.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay, here we go.

LEG. BROWNING:

I see our Commissioner is here from Social Services. I want to say thank you for the information you provided. I am actually meeting today with the CSEA and some child care providers, and I think it would be -- I'd like to hear from you on how we're doing on child care and how many we have on the waiting list. If you can give us some updates on that.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. The Child Care Block Grant, as we've reported before, was reduced a second year in a row for Suffolk County pursuant to a formula that works on past averages and not on current enrollment. So despite the fact that our enrollment increased, we had to reduce eligibility to meet the financial availability of the block grant.

LEG. BROWNING:

Can you remind me on what that eligibility is? I mean, I know that New York State has a requirement -- and we usually were -- our income requirements were different from the State. Are we now at what the State requires or are we still a little higher?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

The State program, the Child Care Program Block Grant is designed for children at the poverty level, which is -- I don't think it's appropriate now to comment on the sense, the common sense -- or lack of common sense with using the Federal poverty line for anything really.

LEG. BROWNING:

Right, right.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

But in any event, we tried always to go a little above that. And most counties do in the State. But two issues complicate that; the rise in enrollment of children seeking it and also the rise in the cost of the child care, which is now up to \$641 per month, per child and climbing.

So as of January, in anticipation of losing this -- the grip on the 200% above poverty line, we reduced it to 185. Then in -- and then in April we sought to reduce it to 150. And then in July we sought to reduce it to the poverty line itself. And that was delayed by a litigation that complained about the content of the termination notice for those -- in those upper categories. That lawsuit took

two weeks before we could start at the poverty line, which combined with a six week delay in OCFS responding to our plan approval to reduce these eligibility levels, they usually take two days, in this instance they took six weeks. So you take the six weeks plus the two weeks of the lawsuit. That eight weeks cost over a million -- almost a million-and-a-half in our continuing to subsidize child care above the poverty level more than we -- than we planned to keep within the confines of the budget of the block grant that was still available.

In other words, we were running out of money. In anticipation of that we tried to reduce eligibility, but we were delayed by a total of two months in doing it by issues beyond our control; the delay in approval of OTTA -- I'm sorry, of OCFS, and the delay of the lawsuit. OCFS eventually did approve what we were doing and the lawsuit did add a third page of what -- out of respect to the court I will only describe as gibberish on the third page of the notice of termination now. That form of termination was OCFS's own form that we were using. But locally it got challenged and the challenge did add some more information.

CSEA has been, shall I say, an incomprehensible role player in this controversy. They know that the form and that the program's funding rests with the State entirely. And yet they sponsored a demonstration outside of the Dennison Building. They have been meeting with Legislators, and one of the things that you may want to mention to them, if they bring it up, is that we have a flexible fund which we could use for child care. But, in fact, we can't because we're trying to make up for using -- we are using the flexible fund for a number of other purposes, not the least of which is child support enforcement. We don't -- we would love to use an increase in the flexible fund that we got for child care, but it's covering a cut in Child Support Enforcement Bureau Administration Assistance, among other things. Flexible fund is not available unless we take it from certain programs that the County will have to make up for with County dollars alone.

So -- and worst of all, the State approved at CSEA's behest, a law was passed in the State Legislature that tasks overburdened, overwhelmed, short-staffed Departments of Social Services with collecting their union dues because CSEA is now representing the child care providers. And why a government agency is tasked with deducting union dues before they pay the providers is something that I find appalling as a Commissioner of this department. And I also think is -- we also know is a source of complaint by the providers themselves. Many of them have complained to us who authorized you to take money out of our payments? Why can't we pay our own union dues? And their reply has been State law -- our reply has been the State passed a law that requires us to do that, to make the department in effect a collection agency for union dues.

So, those are some of the things that I think might be worthy of discussion. But the bottom line is we are now at the poverty line, which is a family of four making \$23,040 a year -- excuse me, \$24,040 a year, and that is terribly inadequate. And over 1,200 children have had the doors closed to them because of the change in the available funding and the consequential change in the available eligibility.

LEG. BROWNING:

So let's say we were to go back to what we did in the past, we're making sure that we were at the 185. How much money would that cost us altogether?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Approximately between nine and ten million. And that would only endure, if we had that injection of funding, until 31 December of this year.

LEG. BROWNING:

And what do we currently get in funding for child care?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

The Child Care Block Grant this year was 29.2 million. Last year it was approximately 29.8, the year before that was 31.

LEG. BROWNING:

Okay. Thank you. I know you're doing the best you can.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Yes. We hope that once the -- we're anxiously awaiting the next Child Care Block Grant. We have been actively pursuing this with the State Delegation, in the State and the State Assembly to see if more attention can be given to changing the formula. That's the long-term, real solution, where the increase in enrollment has to be taken into account. Why would a county like Nassau, which had a significant drop in its enrollment, get an increase in Child Care Block Grant, and Suffolk, which had a significant increase, got a significant decrease in the Child Care Block Grant. It lacks common sense, but yet it is the formula that OCFS is using.

LEG. BROWNING:

Right, right. Okay. I thank you.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Just, Mr. Chairman, I want to say for the benefit of the committee, I distributed copies of updates on our recently very successful up -- I'm sorry, the Stand Up for the Homeless, as well as information on the Food Stamp Program and the Home Energy Assistance Program, which starts really 16 November, but is going to be ending a month earlier, but there will be a significant increase to the benefit of up to \$600 to accommodate the fuel increase, fuel price increases. And by the way, it starts on 19 November this year, not 16; 16 was last year.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Yeah, but you have some more questions. Please have a seat if it's more comfortable for you. Legislator Romaine has a question for you.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Sure.

LEG. ROMAINE:

First of all, I'd like to thank Legislator Browning. She raised a number of good questions regarding child care. It's evident that the State regulations don't work as they should for people in need and certainly people of limited means in need of child care.

But let me ask you another question, because she handled that very well, so I'm going to have one other issue to take up with you, that of the security guards. Where are we with that? Has that been resolved? Is it in arbitration, what's going on with that? Because I think that's one of the concerns I have. I visited some Social Service centers, you as the Commissioner have spoken passionately about this. You understand the concern of safety, not only for the staff, but for the clients that attend these centers, and that sometimes there are people that aren't acting as rational as they should and create problems, and you need a dedicated and professionally trained security staff. Where are we with the security guards?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Well, the security guards remain on duty. We just had a very dramatic lifesaving incident last week involving an epileptic fit suffered by a pregnant young woman, which a security guard addressed very effectively and professionally. They certainly are important to us. But the decision, as it should, rests with the elected officials as to where -- what their fate is in the budget. I can tell you

that the court action that temporarily restrained the County from proceeding with the layoffs did result in the temporary restraining order, which was then -- which concluded with a judge's ordering the guards to proceed with arbitration on the question in the AME contract of whether the existing employees on the payroll with a current work assignment can be replaced with a contract agency as is permissible for use of assignments that are not currently staffed in County government. That's the essence of the contract issue. That arbitration hearing, I understand an arbitrator has been selected and that it will be heard on September 11th, and that the Administration will forego the layoffs until that process --

LEG. ROMAINE:

Until the arbitration is done?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Say again?

LEG. ROMAINE:

The Administration will forego layoffs until the arbitrator issues his opinion?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

No, I don't understand it to be to that extent. I understand that it will be until 60 days from the judge's decision, which was mid-July, and so I know that the arbitration will be within the start of the arbitration. Its initiation will be within the 60 days, but I don't know -- I don't believe there's any understanding as to what happens if the arbitration proceeding endures beyond the 60 days.

LEG. ROMAINE:

So they may not wait for the arbitrator's ruling, instead they may proceed with layoffs. Based on that, has the Administration contacted you about who would provide security services for our Social Service centers?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

We have not -- we only understand that it will be the firm Dreamland Security. But we don't know when.

LEG. ROMAINE:

You don't know when.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Not --

LEG. ROMAINE:

So you haven't been contacted about who's going to take over security. If I'm not mistaken, today's August 30th.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Right.

LEG. ROMAINE:

The judge's 60 day order was issued approximately when?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

I believe July 15th or 14th.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Okay. So we're talking within the next two weeks it's possible that this Administration may fire the security guards and hire a private security firm to do this service. But they haven't spoke to you about it, and I'm wondering if they haven't spoke to the Commissioner, and they certainly haven't spoke to me, I don't know about my colleagues, they might be in better graces with our County Executive, maybe they spoke to them, but I suspect not. So, I mean, this doesn't seem like a well organized plan to me. Let me ask you this: There's arbitration going on right now. Is there any attempt by the Administration to undercut the arbitration by offering security guards lower paying jobs at the community college?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

I'm given to understand that there's been discussion with the community college and some of the guards, but I don't know the substance of those discussions, other than that it concerns some vacant campus guard positions.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Well, hopefully -- I think there's a representative in the audience of the Administration. What I would like to do is encourage the Administration to at least keep you informed and briefed on security at our Social Service centers. If there's going to be a change in the next two or three weeks, I think as Commissioner you should be aware of that. I have questions about the security firm that you mentioned, simply because I had heard that they really did not want to work at Social Service centers at the offer that they were being offered, which was the same, I think, bid price they got for John J. Foley. And they felt that the work at Social Services center obviously is more complex and difficult and they didn't want to work for the same price. I don't know if that's still a contractual issue. I would like the Administration to get back to me about that.

Clearly this is an unresolved issue and clearly all of us have expressed -- I mean, we all voted differently on the budget, I got that. We all voted differently on the layoffs, I got that. But I think all of us would say that we do have concern to make sure that there is adequate security in place at the Social Service center. And I would encourage the Administration to not only communicate with you, but with the Chairman of our Human Services Committee, Legislator DuWayne Gregory, so that we as a committee could be kept up-to-date on this situation. I don't know when our next meeting is, Mr. Chairman, but I don't think it's until October.

So, I mean, I just think that that would be very helpful if there was an e-mail to both yourself or at least to our committee Chairman to keep us as lawmakers involved, because although people voted differently on the budget doesn't mean we don't share the same concerns and I'm sure we do.

So, you know, I'm raising that question because I think that's a critical question for your operation. You, every time I hear you come, I listen to how many ways you are hog tied, prevented from doing things with the -- because of State regulations, because of a whole host of things. At least you should know who's providing security. That's within our grasp.

So thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've raised my concerns, you understand my concerns. I think everyone on this committee, and maybe I'm wrong, but everyone on this committee shares my concerns. I don't hear dissent so I'll take it as a yes. So thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

All right. Thank you. Commissioner, just back to the child care for a moment. I assume that you're -- you have been in discussions with the Administration about the 2013 budget.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay. Has there been any specific recommendations concerning child care and, you know, increasing a subsidy from or funding from the County to provide it?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

We were directed to submit a budget that was five to 10% below last year. We have -- all of our mandated budget has increased. The small portion of the DSS budget that we'll be discussing when the recommended budget finally comes out from the Administration has a very small portion that's discretionary in the department, and we were not in a position to suggest any new initiatives. We have not had funding from the County for -- that would supplement the Child Care Block Grant since 2000 -- since the 2008 Operating Budget.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

And, in fact, from my understanding, that probably would hurt our block grant from the State, because they seem to hold that against us.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Right. Even after they encouraged us to use ARRA funds, the stimulus funding that the County received a couple of years ago, after we used it for child care, it was held against us. It was as though we contributed our own money. And whenever that happens in that -- again, that elusive and virtually impossible to explain, indecipherable formula that the State uses, they will penalize the County if it has made contributions from any sources to supplement the block grant. And in the past two years when we didn't, they penalized us anyway for reasons that remain unclear.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

So it's really a tenuous position where we're captive to the will of the State.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Right.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

And it doesn't make sense, obviously because of this formula. It just doesn't make sense.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Right. It's, again, a break in the classic governmental function of having elected officials, namely the Governor and the State Legislature, delegate some of the -- after they make the general policy decision they delegate it to an agency, a bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy seems to run on its own in directions that I don't think the policy makers envisioned, and that's clearly what's happened with child care.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

And we're going to be meeting -- our next meeting of this committee is October first. I'll reach out -- I'll have my office reach out to the Administration to see what their -- what's going on with the security guards, that we have a better understanding of what's going on. My personal understanding, and this is reading the Newsday article, and if I recall it correctly, was that the Administration requested that they would delay any layoffs if the union agreed to go into arbitration.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Right. Well, they -- it was the court that ordered it to go to arbitration, and the Administration did communicate with the department that we will hold the guards in place until the arbitration unfolds, but not really until the whole arbitration unfolds. They committed to 60 days.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Right. I think -- I think it was an expedited arbitration, whatever that means. I thought arbitration was arbitration, but I guess --

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Right, it's between the union and management.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Right, right, right.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

And management in this case would be in the person of the Labor Relations Director. And it was with him that we were communicating about the guard status. But I think in their defense that they and no one else really knows what's going to happen with arbitration, so it's very hard to plan -- do a backup plan because it might in effect seem to undermine the arbitration if we proceeded as though the arbitration decision would go towards -- in one direction and the layoffs would go through, would succeed, when we're not really in a position to make that step, to take that step.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay. All right. Well, thank you. Anyone else have any questions? No? Okay. Thank you, Commissioner. You're going to be around? I wanted to talk to you.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Sure.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

All right. We have nothing further on our agenda, so we are adjourned. Thank you.

(THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 11:04 A.M.)